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THE GROWING UTILITY OF POLITICAL TERRORISM

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THE GROWING UTILITY OF POLITICAL TERRORISM.

by

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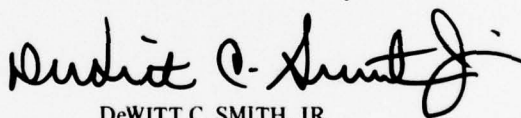*Military issues research memo.*

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FOREWORD

This memorandum considers the increasing use of terrorism to gain political objectives, which has been furthered by conditions unique to contemporary times. In the author's view, the worldwide coverage capabilities of the mass media, coupled with their willingness to report violent incidents, have provided the terrorist with a means of exposure to the world public that will permit him to articulate his motives and objectives. In addition, the author discusses other trends which are contributing to the proliferation of terrorism: advancing weapons technology permits terrorist groups to possess extreme destructive power; the socio-psychological climate in world populace is conducive to the development of terrorism; and, little international cooperation in curbing terrorism has been achieved. He concludes that, since international cooperation to suppress terrorism is unlikely in the near future, it will be a factor in world affairs at least through the 1980's.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

COLONEL MURL D. MUNGER has been assigned to the Strategic Studies Institute since his graduation from the US Army War College in 1974. A licensed professional engineer, he is a graduate from the University of Kansas and holds a bachelor's degree in geological engineering and a master's degree in mass communications. Colonel Munger has held a wide variety of command and staff positions and currently is Chairman of the Western Hemisphere Study Group. His special areas of interest include Latin American affairs and US Reserve Forces management.

THE GROWING UTILITY OF POLITICAL TERRORISM

> ... Military strategy can no longer be thought of as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation, and deterrence. The instruments of war are more punitive than acquisitive. Military strategy, whether we like it or not, has become the diplomacy of violence . . . .[1]

Thomas C. Schelling

The use of terror to influence one man's behavior to satisfy another man's desire is as old as mankind. The fear of one Neanderthal that another might crush his skull with a stone axe for failure to comply with certain conditions definitely had a coercive effect. Beginning with the cavemen, the application of terror to achieve political ends can be traced throughout history. However, because of conditions unique to contemporary times, the words of Thomas Schelling are as pertinent to an understanding of the growing utility of terrorism as they are for understanding nuclear brinkmanship. They place the role of political terrorism in proper perspective within modern warfare. Sovereign nations and small organized political units are now alike in their ability to wield terror as an instrument for either political stability or for political change. The magnitude of their influence is dependent upon their arsenal, but the morality is the same.

Currently both the United States and the Soviet Union are using

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the threat of mass destruction as a deterrent to war. Mass destruction translates here to mean the death of over 200 million people and the end of society as we know it in the countries involved. This is the use of intimidation and terror on a grand scale, it is both US and USSR national policy, and it is an accepted fact of life. Yet, there is no unrelenting, worldwide public demand that this form of mutually assured destruction be eliminated. Perhaps the very enormity of this threat of terror makes its likelihood of use (like contemplating your own death) "unthinkable." Perhaps this reality is rationalized as an unreal threat.

But terror can be very "thinkable" and very real. This is especially so when used on a lesser scale by individuals or small groups which make more selective threats, promising less indiscriminate destruction. Terror used in this manner can be made a significant weapon for forcing political change and it is this use of terror that is addressed herein. Terror and terrorism are now being studied, analyzed, perfected, and employed in many areas of the world. The focus of this paper is, then, the rationality of political terrorism, its usefulness, and the part it may play in shaping the world of the future.

The extreme lethality of modern weapons, which inhibits their use by major powers in open warfare, can be readily adapted by the terrorist to pursue his goals. Any increase in the potential destructiveness of the terrorist's arsenal enhances *his ability to* terrorize increasingly large population segments. Since his primary goals are usually not financial, the political terrorist needs a forum that provides exposure to the world public and that will permit him to publicize his motives and objectives. This forum is provided by the mass media which appear ready and willing to report in detail the incidents surrounding dramatic terrorist actions. With the will, the means, and the required publicity all available, the words of Schelling become applicable to the political terrorist. He can now practice the "art of coercion" and engage in the "diplomacy of violence."

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terror is a state of intense fear, an overwhelming impulse of hysteria or dread. It is a psychic condition which can influence

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physical acts. The word *terror*, which is a derivative of the Latin verb *terrere* meaning, to tremble, conveys a mental picture of fear affecting or paralyzing physical response. Few individuals have not, at one time or another, experienced the extremely uncomfortable feeling of terror. Since the desire to avoid experiencing terror is intrinsic to all rational persons, it is small wonder that some humans exploit this emotion to influence the decisions and actions of others.

Terrorism is the systematic use of terror for coercion and a terrorist is a practicioner of terrorism. Political terrorism as defined herein is an organized campaign of civil violence for political objectives carried out by a group opposed to an established government. It may be international or confined within a single nation. Its genesis usually results from perceived injustices (real or imagined) or ideological goals which require, in the opinion of the terrorist, a definite political act or actions to correct. Terrorism normally is a consequence of the inability of a group to achieve the desired change through normal governmental processes or nonviolent expressions. The resort to terrorism implies a real or perceived limitation on the part of the terrorist group to achieve its goals by other means. Political terrorists are striving to build a political base while simultaneously eroding the power base of the establishment group. Acts of terror, when carefully orchestrated, are not necessarily counterproductive to favorable public opinion.

International acts of terror, if sufficiently violent, are given immediate prominence by the mass media. National or worldwide attention is often focused upon the terrorist and his political goals. Countries not originally involved in the terrorists' political objectives often become active participants as the program of terror unfolds. (Examples include West Germany in the Olympic massacre, Austria in the OPEC kidnappings, and the United States in the Beirut kidnapping of Colonel Morgan.) External political pressures are frequently exerted by other concerned countries to resolve the issues. The terrorists' publicity objective is then achieved and in many cases a hero-martyr role is established. Whenever a government negotiates with a dissident group, the group's goal of recognized legitimacy as a political unit is furthered.

The goals of the political terrorist in opposing an established government may be either revolutionary or subrevolutionary. If revolutionary, the terrorist's objective is the destruction or

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overthrow of the existing government. Subrevolutionary goals may include changes in law, release of political prisoners, punishments for past actions, or warnings to specific officials. However, there is no concerted effort for overthrow of the present government.

Classifying types of terrorism provides a convenient way to understand the specific tactics employed. Three categories generally recognized by students of terrorism are:

● *Demonstration Terrorism.*[2] This category is designed to show all concerned (and outside observers) that the terrorists have the capacity and the determination to act. It is used to unnerve the opponent, impress the populace, and erode public confidence in the government to maintain order. Publicity is desired and political legitimacy as a political group is often the goal. (The Palestine Liberation Organization has been particularly successful in this area.) Assassinations, bombings, kidnappings, and armed attacks on government activities are examples of demonstration terrorism.

● *Bargaining Terrorism.*[3] A natural follow-on from demonstration terrorism is bargaining terrorism. After the opposition terrorist group has established its ability to act violently and the inability of the government to control these acts, this new dimension is added. Bargaining terrorism seeks some specific concession from the establishment in exchange for not carrying out some credible threat. Examples include demands for political reform or removal of certain officials, kidnapping for some sort of ransom, threat of assassination, threat of destruction of some vital installation, and the like.

● *Repressive Terrorism.*[4] The use of terrorist acts of violence by the government against an opposition terrorist group is repressive terrorism. This form of violence is often called counterterror terrorism. The latter term is somewhat inaccurate because, although the government may intend that repressive violence be directed only at the opposition terrorist, experience indicates that it usually becomes arbitrary, indiscriminate, and difficult to control. (Recent examples include the Indonesian government's campaign against Communist terrorists in 1965 and 1966, the Israeli reprisal raids on Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon, and the Phoenix program in South Viet Nam.) It is because of this indiscrimination that the opposition terrorist often seeks the institution of repressive terrorism by the government, believing this will lead to an increasing alienation of the people from their present leaders.

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RATIONALITY OF POLITICAL TERRORISM

Those who consider the acts of a political terrorist as irrational reflect a lack of understanding of his premises. His violent acts are usually designed to achieve some political end. Failure to achieve his goal through nonviolent means has caused him to believe that violent action may be successful (or partially successful) and better than continued failure or no action at all. He is not irrational. On the contrary, he is logically trying to achieve his goal with limited assets. Nor does the terrorist consider his actions immoral or himself amoral. Rather, he considers selective assassinations or random murder as regrettable, but necessary, and certainly morally preferable to the slaughter involved in more conventional warfare. He knows from observing history that coercive violence against the right targets at the right time can bring political change.

The dedicated terrorist then, is usually an idealist who believes that his actions are both correct and justified. He may believe the government he opposes is corrupt, not representative of the people, and therefore illegitimate. His revolutionary actions are designed to eliminate a perceived evil political and social order. He feels motivated by higher calling and therefore not responsible to the man-made law of the establishment. Some terrorist groups (and some governments) ascribe to the theory of just vengeance. Such is the case in the Arab attacks against the Israelis or the Israeli repressive terror operations against the Palestinian guerrillas. In any event, the leadership is usually convinced that its actions are rational, moral, and necessary in light of worthy goals and the frustrations encountered when other means were utilized.

The terrorist group does not need to be loved but does need to be heard and recognized. It needs no justification other than to believe the actions will benefit the cause. To determine whether a terrorist is acting rationally or not requires that his frame of reference be considered. As one Arab delegate to the United Nations stated during the attack on the Israeli athletes in Munich, "... One man's terrorism is another man's patriotism."[5] Rationality therefore may be in the eye of the beholder.

UTILITY OF TERRORISM

To have utility, terrorism must be both achievable and

productive. The terrorist leadership must conclude that a campaign of terror would contribute to the political objective. Can terror alone win the prize or is it only a necessary prelude to a war of national liberation (insurgent war)? Are the potential gains worth the risks and cost involved? What time factors are involved? What outside assistance can be expected? What is the "track record" of similar terrorist movements? These and other factors must be weighed by the potential terrorist.

A review of past and present terrorist activities indicates that terror campaigns have been successful in enough instances to warrant their continued use by dissident groups. The assassinations of UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte and Lord Moyne, British Minister of State for the Near East, coupled with other Jewish terrorist activities in the 1940's did more to establish a separate Israeli state than battalions of regular troops could have done, and with relatively small loss of life. The terrorist leadership can look to other examples such as Cyprus, Cuba, Kenya, Algeria, or even Viet Nam to encourage its efforts. From the failures of terrorist movements in Bolivia, Malaya and Uruguay, the terrorist can hope to learn what mistakes to avoid. With a linkage of revolutionary groups around the world, he seeks support and a form of recognized legitimacy of his tactics. If the terrorist group can gain the backing of a sponsor nation, so much the better.

To wage a campaign of random terror is relatively easy today and is becoming more so with each advance in weapons, transportation, and communications technologies. It requires only a few motivated individuals possessing the means for destruction of life and property. However, to conduct an intelligent program of political terrorism that has some reasonable hope of success requires much more. There needs to exist widespread and unresolved socioeconomic problems that can create political unrest. One difference between the tragicomic Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) and the highly efficient Argentine Peoples Revolutionary Army (ERP) is that the ERP is guided by a strong Marxist ideology in exploiting the serious economic and political problems of Argentina. The SLA on the other hand had no definable philosophy and no social or political problems of a magnitude that could entice public support of their cause.

We should not overlook the fact that the SLA members perceived a cause for which they were willing to die and that other

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groups now exist which have the same dedication to their various causes. The point being that terrorist groups can coalesce behind a minor cause and exploit existing unrest or dissatisfaction with an established government. If unsatisfactory psychosocial conditions are widespread among the populace, the easier the formation of terrorist cells and the greater the public support for their cause.

The tactics are simple. The terrorist attempts to identify the government with the problem while identifying his cause with the solution. He proclaims his actions are designed to ultimately better the conditions of the general populace. He then attempts to undermine public confidence in the government by demonstrating its impotence in halting terrorist attacks. Next, the terrorist bargains for political power. He may or may not win his objective. He may attain a partial success. As a minimum, he may achieve only a personal sense of martyrdom. In any event, since he had virtually nothing to start with, his cause has lost little and perhaps gained much. The same can be said of a sponsor nation if it feels essentially immune from counterattack. The cost is relatively little, especially when compared with formal war, and the percent of return has a chance of being great.

When considering the utility of terrorism against differing governmental systems, certain paradoxes appear. For instance, within democratic societies (as contrasted with autocratic societies), terrorist groups may more easily organize, secure arms, and evade capture, but there is usually less public sympathy for the violent methods employed to attain political objectives. Democratic systems provide ways for relieving most political frustrations that develop within the electorate. Totalitarian systems conversely make it difficult to organize, arm, or conduct terrorist operations, but the potential for widespread public approval and support of a terrorist movement is much greater than in democratic countries. The Soviet Union is quite cognizant of these facts. Although the Soviets, or their surrogates, are eager to "fish in the troubled waters" of the Third World nations, they appear reluctant to sponsor, to any great degree, terrorist activities in Western Europe or the United States. Perhaps this is because of the questionable chance for any real success but more likely it is because of their almost paranoid concern about similar methods being used against them in their satellite nations of Eastern Europe.

Thus knowing that all governments are vulnerable to acts of

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terrorism, the coercive diplomacy of violence can be practiced not only by major world powers in nuclear or subnuclear brinkmanship but also by extremist groups possessing the will to exploit social unrest and the means to mount a credible threat. The government, if consistently unsuccessful in preventing terrorist acts, must surely become either more repressive or more susceptible to political accommodation with opposition demands. The usual response is greater and greater repression. As such repressions occur, the population concerned (and outside observers as well) tend to become increasingly disenchanted with the government efforts. On the other hand if the government fails to respond significantly, sympathy may grow for the terrorists. Studies by social psychologists have found that groups tend to identify with aggressive behavior and turn against organizations displaying passive or submissive tendencies.[6] People tend to increasingly identify with the winning group.

The above statements should not be construed to mean that terrorism is bound to be successful in achieving its goals or that establishment groups cannot successfully combat terrorism. Governments have and are waging successful repressive terrorism campaigns or otherwise eliminating the underlying cause that motivated the terrorist movement. The point intended is that terrorism has utility, is within the capabilities of a small organized and dedicated group, and has been successful on many occasions in accomplishing political change. These successful examples offer the needed encouragement to dissident elements whose frustrations have not been alleviated by nonviolent means. Unrelieved frustration is the soil where the seed of terrorism can grow. When this seed is further nourished by assistance from an external group or nation, the growth, stamina, and survivability of the terrorist plant is multiplied.

With the above thoughts in mind, what role will terrorism play in shaping the world political scene between now and the year 1990? How will military organizations and future warfare be affected? What utility value does terrorism have for political units of all sizes from dissident groups to superpowers? Should the democracies which are vulnerable to terrorism, not only consider how best to combat such activities but also explore ways of exporting offensive terrorism as a means of protecting their national interests? Before developing a scenario for 1990, an examination of certain trends at work in the world today is necessary.

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CURRENT TRENDS

In today's world, certain political, technological, and socioeconomic trends favor the use and proliferation of terrorism. Some of the more significant are:

• *Exorbitant Costs of Modern Weaponry Plus the Capability for Mass Destruction Are Making Formal War Too Expensive.*

For some, the costs and destructiveness of modern warfare, including insurgent wars, are becoming prohibitive to the point where, even to the victor, total cost may exceed the net gain. As a result, strategists are examining alternate means of achieving political goals when confronted by adversary nations. The relative cost to a nation in sponsoring international terrorism and the disproportionate influence that a well-trained terrorist group can exert becomes an attractive alternative to war.

• *The Socio/Psychological Climate in Today's World is Conducive to Development of Terrorism.*

Current social and economic pressures are creating conditions increasingly favorable to the development of terrorist movements. Peoples of various Third World nations, with cultural, ideological, and racial differences, plus growing populations and diminishing resources, are often ruled by ineffective, corrupt, and repressive governments. Improved educational and communication systems have increased their expectations for a better life. This situation creates an ideal spawning ground for terrorist movements.

In Western nations, growing egalitarianism, economic instability, the effect of mass communications, and a questioning of traditional values, are combining to make it increasingly difficult for governments to govern. While terrorism is less likely to flourish in democratic nations where varying political ideologies can be openly expressed, any shift towards autocracy or use of police-state methods to suppress small terrorist groups will normally increase the chances of terrorist proliferation and public support for their cause.

Nations governed by totalitarian regimes remain potentially susceptible to terrorist activity. Harsh repressive measures of a police state have prevented such activity from flourishing. However, such regimes have particular difficulty at times when a transfer of power from a departing leader to a successor is required and a

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power struggle develops. At times like this, the power vacuum occurring before a new government consolidates presents an opportune time for terrorism and violence to effect change if sufficient discontent exists within the masses. Discontent does exist in many nations of the Socialist world that have been affected by the same social and economic pressures impacting on the Third World and the Western nations.

● *Advancing Weapons Technology Will Permit Small Terrorist Groups to Possess Extreme Destructive Power.*

The advance of technology continues to enhance the destructive capabilities of all terrorist groups. Even those groups not sponsored by external forces will be able to enlarge their bargaining power by increasing the lethality of their arsenals. With the growing proliferation of nuclear power installations and the continued program for nuclear weapons development in various countries, the likelihood of terrorist groups acquiring nuclear materials is growing. With either a nuclear explosive or chemical products capable of contaminating public water supplies, the terrorists could hold entire cities hostage, thereby gaining enormous bargaining power. This situation is currently feasible. For example on February 27, 1976, Austrian police arrested four individuals possessing approximately one liter of the nerve agent "Tabun" (diisopropylflourophosphate). The nerve agent was destined for sale to a Mid-Eastern terrorist group.[7]

● *Terrorism Has Been on the Increase During the Past Decade but Little International Cooperation for Curbing Terrorism Has Been Achieved or Appears Likely.*

A review of incidents of terrorism during the past decade shows it to be an increasing problem for the international community, and the trend will likely continue unless effective international sanctions are adopted and applied. To date, neither the United Nations nor any other organization has been effective in curbing international terrorism. International law does not provide for any legal measures against the international terrorist. In fact, no mutually agreed-upon definition of terrorism has been accepted by the UN and none is likely to be accepted in the foreseeable future.

Proposals submitted by the United States to the United Nations concerning the control of international terrorism have usually reflected the opinion of the non-Marxist and non-Third World countries. The Western nations believe in suppressing international

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terrorism because it is contrary to their historical concept of law and order. This does not hold true for a majority of other nations of the world with their divergent histories, ideologies, and national interests. Therefore, international terrorism receives implied approval from many governments.

TERRORISM NOW AND TOMORROW

The trends that favor the proliferation of terrorist movements will affect the political and military policies of most major nations.

The Soviet Union and certain nations within the Soviet orbit are now actively supporting revolutionary movements which further their interests in Third World countries. Support has included not only weapons but also training assistance, technician advisers, funding, and in some cases, military combatants. Current examples include Angola, Argentina, the Palestine Liberation Organization, Dhofar, the Spanish Sahara, Rhodesia, and Thailand.

The terrorist threat to the United States is growing. According to Clarence Kelly, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there were 89 bombings attributable to terrorist activity in our nation during 1975, as compared to 45 in 1974 and 24 in 1973. During the past 5 years there have been 255 bombings, 122 firebombings, 45 sniping incidents, 120 shootings, and 24 ambushes.[8] While most of the world's 300 known terrorist groups do not present a direct threat to US lives and property, the US Department of Justice has expressed concern that terrorist attacks in the United States may be conducted by Fedayeen (Arab groups), the Japanese Red Army, and the Weather Underground.[9]

Externally, many nations, whose friendship or neutrality are important to the United States, have governments which are susceptible to political change as an outgrowth of terrorism. Examples include Spain, Panama, Argentina (important because of strategic location at Cape Horn if the Panama Canal is not available to the United States), Jamaica, Mexico, Rhodesia, and South Africa to name only a few.

Could our interests in those countries really be threatened by terrorism? The answer is an unqualified YES! Those who doubt should remember that in early 1975, few in the United States believed that Angola would be governed by Marxists in early 1976

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or that Yassar Arafat would be treated almost as a head of state when he visited the United Nations. They also should remember that as late as 1972, there was little thought that the Viet Cong movement would today be governing in Saigon. In each of these cases, terrorism played a significant role in effecting the political change.

What then should US policymakers anticipate when considering the place of terrorism in the dynamics of world politics? One likely scenario for the 1977-90 period could be postulated as follows:

• Situations and political conditions will exist in numerous nations which preclude free expression of political thought and reasonable possibilities for desired political, economic, or social change. Resulting frustrations will result in formation of groups so desperate for recognition and expression that they will resort to violent acts for political ends. Both national and international terrorist movements will exist.

• National governments, recognizing the cost and destructiveness of formal warfare, will have explored alternative methods for exerting political or economic influence over adversary nations. They will recognize the practicality and economy of sponsored terrorism plus the unique ability of the terrorists to operate in urban environments against highly visible targets. Consequently, sponsor nations will support client terrorist groups.

• Terror applied by groups and/or governments against governments and/or populations exists as an accepted form of warfare in a majority of nations of the world. The United States will express abhorrence of this idea but realize it as a fact of life. Inconclusive debate will continue in international forums.

• Proliferation of terrorist groups will reinforce the feeling of legitimacy of each terrorist. Targets, victim types and numbers, and weaponry will range greatly among different terrorist philosophies.

• Terrorist actions, both internal and international, will continue and become more violent, particularly in Third World nations. Caution will be exercised by sponsor nations to avoid direct confrontation that might escalate to formal war.

• Weapons used by terrorists will increase in lethality and destructiveness. Special terror weapons such as nuclear devices, genetic disrupters, mind-altering chemicals, crop destruction agents, and highly toxic poisons may be added to their arsenals.

• Strategies for combating internal and international terrorism

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will be developed by all governments. Options will vary from stringent repression to major concessions in accordance with the situation anticipated.

• Military forces will be structured, equipped, and trained for counterterror missions as well as commitment in formal warfare.

• Partial successes as well as factional disagreements will fragment many terrorist movements into opposing groups, thereby decreasing their effectiveness.

• Some terrorist movements will attain their goals and others will fail. More will fail than succeed because of their inability to win public support. Enough will succeed to perpetuate the concept.

SUMMARY

Terrorism has a growing utility in effecting political change. The terrorist usually considers himself a dedicated patriot or idealist who has rationally decided that acts of terrorism are his best and often only approach to achieving his political goal. He does not consider his actions immoral.

Terrorism has been successful in changing both government policies and governments themselves. While it has failed in several instances, it has succeeded in enough instances to encourage the proliferation of terrorist movements.

Formal war is now so dangerous and expensive that major powers are searching for suitable alternatives. The socioeconomic and political climate existing today favors terrorist development. Tomorrow's terrorists will possess extremely powerful and lethal weapons. Hence, they will have considerable bargaining power.

Suppression of international terrorism requires international cooperation and agreement. Since there appears little likelihood of this in the near term, terrorism will be a factor in world affairs during the 1977-90 period. The questions for a nation-state to consider then are, how to minimize the effects of opposition terrorism and how to export terrorism to the state's advantage if need be. These are questions the US policymakers would do well to ponder.

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ENDNOTES

1. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence,* p. 34.

2. US Army War College, *Readings for Special Study Group on International Terrorism,* September 13, 1973, p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Paul Wilkinson, *Political Terrorism,* p. 40.

5. US Army War College, *Readings for Special Study Group on International Terrorism,* September 13, 1973, p. 4.

6. US Department of State Conference, Bureau of Intelligence and Research and The Planning and Coordination Staff, *State Department Conference on Terrorism,* December 29, 1972, p. 5.

7. US Army ACSI *Intelligence Summary 46-76,* March 8, 1976.

8. "TERRORISM–The Ultimate Evil," *Washington Report,* WR76-1, January 1976, p. 3. (Washington Report is a publication of the American Security Council.)

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

This paper addresses the growing utility of terrorism in effecting political change. The rationality and morality of terrorist movements are discussed with an explanation of current world conditions and technological advances which make terrorism an attractive alternate to formal warfare. Terms of reference are defined and a likely scenario for the use of the terrorism during the 1977-1990 frame is postulated.

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